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ABSTRACT

Building the proper climate in the communication process depends upon the beliefs of the persons in leadership roles. Team operation and the establishment of the proper operational climate depends upon the behavior and contribution of each member of an organization as well as the chief administrator. The administrator who makes an effort toward identifying, developing, and utilizing the resources of each member of the group will enhance the operation of team management. An organization built on the assumption and values of the self-actualization of individuals will have a climate conducive to meaningful team operation. A supportive, open climate facilitates accuracy in communication. In building the proper climate of communication with staff members, the chief administrator is able to listen, empathize, understand, handle personal feelings, express himself, and be accepting. The success of the administrator in setting the proper climate depends upon the perceived existing prestige of the administrator and the extent of his requisite expertise. It is important that the chief administrator understand himself, analyze his strengths and weaknesses as a communicator, and clearly keep in mind the characteristics of the audience he will face and the objectives he wants to achieve. A 13-item selected reading list concludes this document. (EM)

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"How To Communicate With Your Professional Staff"

Clinic B-35

BUILD THE PROPER CLIMATE

Building the proper climate in the communication process depends to a very large extent upon the beliefs of the individual who finds himself in the leadership role. In order to establish the proper climate in which meaningful decisions are reached, one cannot conclude that there is a particular person, or group of persons, who are destined for leadership, regardless of the organizational circumstances in which he finds himself. Team operation or management, so essential in an educational setting, does not depend heavily upon one particular kind of administrative leader at its helm. Teamwork tends to be most effective when there is a sharing of leadership. There should exist in the leaders a belief in the capacities of human nature, faith in human intelligence and in the power of pooled and cooperative experience.

Every autocratic and authoritarian scheme of social action rests on the belief that the needed intelligence is confined to a superior few who, because of inherent natural gifts, are endowed with the ability and the right to control the conduct of others; laying down principles and rules and directing the ways in which they are carried out. It would be foolish to deny that much can be said for this point of view. It is such autocratic beliefs that controlled human behavior in social groups for much the greater part of human history. Even where democracies now exist, men's minds are still permeated with ideas about leadership imposed from above. But surely no such leadership beliefs should exist in an educational setting in a democracy such as ours.

Team operation and the establishment of the proper operational climate depend as much upon the behavior and contribution of every member of the organization as it does upon the Chief Administrator. This proposition is increasingly shared by behavioral scientists as well as by professional education managers who have devoted themselves to the practice of researched-based administration. The administrative leader does initiate structure and provide consideration, two unusually important leadership processes in the life of any organization. Yet, without the full commitment and contribution of every organizational member, management is seriously hampered in its efforts to build a truly viable organization wherein open communication is manifest. The realization of this critical role of teamwork has prompted educational leaders to seek ways to involve every member of the organization. Management will make full use of the potential capabilities of its human resources only when each person in an organization is a member of one or more effectively functioning work groups that have a high degree of group loyalty, effective skills of interaction and high performance goals.

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It is through team operation that renewal, the concept which is rapidly becoming a household word in management circles, can be realized. For the individual, for the organization, for all of the social order, renewal offers perhaps man's last opportunity to achieve viability and stability in an all-too-rapidly changing world. At a time when man-made groups are filled with stress, dissension, conflict and even revolt, renewal just may be the most effective strategy for educational stability and advancement.

Effective team operation is not a simple and easy task to accomplish. For many organizations, it never becomes a reality - at least, one may reasonably conclude that it never operates at its highest level of effectiveness. It is the kind of goal for which every group member, including the administrative leader must constantly strive. It seems to be a kind of elusive goal which denies any one set of principles which work equally well for every organization. Behavioral scientists have recommended for consideration several concepts and related principles which, when adapted to a particular organization, can be very helpful in establishing conditions which foster team operation. Among these concepts is climate.

Recent leadership research has centered upon the situation in which leadership occurs. The leader and other members of the group interact at a particular time and a particular place and within a specific set of circumstances. In such a setting, true leadership emerges, that leadership which tends to help the group reach its goals. As the situation changes, different leadership abilities are required, and these abilities may exist in any member of the group. The Administrative Leader must be adaptive and flexible so as to be able to respond immediately to each unique set of circumstances. The Administrator who devotes as much effort toward the identification, development and utilization of leadership resources of each member of the group as he does toward exercising his own leadership perogatives will enhance the operation of team management.

The educational administrator who recognizes the importance of each staff member should organize the resources of the educational institution in such a way that all could work together in defining purposes and objectives. He would utilize the motivation inherent in each person. His work would consist in a large measure of removing obstacles, creating opportunities, freeing potential, challenging capacity, and encouraging growth and change.

Team operation depends heavily upon a group of increasingly self-actualizing, fully functioning human beings. An organization built on the assumptions and values of self-actualization is likely to have a climate which is conducive to meaningful group work and thus to team operation.

Many of the significant effects of the organization's climate upon its members and the people it serves have been verified through research. A few of the generalizations which are generally supported in the literature are:

1. Climate is significantly associated with the accuracy of communications in that a hostile, more closed, formal climate tends to block communications while a supportive, relatively open, informal climate with high levels of trust facilitates accuracy in communications.

2. An open and supportive climate produces greater spontaneity and initiative and tends to improve decision making and problem-solving ability of those affected.

3. An open and supportive climate tends to promote greater production and improved quality on both voluntary and required tasks.

4. An open and supportive climate tends to build greater commitment to and enthusiasm for the philosophy and mission of the organization.

5. A closed and hostile climate on the other hand, tends to produce greater dependence upon the formal leaders and less upon group member initiative.

6. A closed and hostile climate tends to promote self-interest, lack of creativity, and lack of enthusiasm for the work of the organization.

7. A closed and hostile climate produces greater anxiety and passiveness toward the organization and its mission.

8. A closed and hostile climate often produces defensiveness and a resistance to ideas and suggestions, whereas a supportive climate tends to produce outgoing, open, tolerant employees and clientele.

Many factors appear to be associated with the establishment and development of the organization's climate. Community support, organizational resources, needs fulfillment, and opportunity for recognition and advancement tend to influence the quality of the organization's climate. One of the most influential factors - one which appears to be most enhancing of the climate conducive to team operation, as mentioned before, seems to be the beliefs of the administrative leader of the team.

A number of researchers at the University of Florida investigated the perceptual differences between good and poor professional workers in education, counseling, and the ministry. From these studies, good professional workers were clearly distinguished from poor ones with respect to the following beliefs about people.

1. Internal over External Frame of Reference - The true or good professional worker's general frame of reference can be described as internal rather than external. He is sensitive to and concerned with how things seem to others with whom he interacts and uses this belief as a basis for his own behavior.

2. People over Things Orientation - He is most concerned with people and their reactions rather than with things, events, and activities.

3. Meanings over Facts Orientation - The good professional worker is keenly sensitive to how things seem to people rather than concerned exclusively with concrete events. The exploration of ideas and discovery of meanings through interactions with people are important components of his belief.

4. Immediate over Historical Causation - He seeks the causes of people's behavior in their current thinking, feeling, beliefs, and understandings rather than in objective descriptions of the forces exerted upon them now or in the past.

5. Able over Unable - The true professional worker perceives others as having the capacities to deal with their problems as opposed to doubting their capacity to handle themselves and their lives.

6. Friendly over Unfriendly - He sees others as being friendly and enhancing, not a threat but well-intentioned rather than evil-intentioned - "on our side."

7. Worthy over Unworthy - He tends to see other people as being worthy of our respect. They are seen as possessing dignity and integrity which must be respected, rather than seeing them as unimportant.

8. Internal over External Motivation - The professional worker tends to see people and behavior as developing from within rather than as products of external forces. People are seen as dynamic, creative, and growing rather than passive, inert, and vegetating.

9. Dependable over Undependable - He tends to see people as basically trustworthy and dependable in the sense of behaving in a lawful way.

10. Helpful over Hindering - He tends to see people as being potentially fulfilling and enhancing to self rather than impeding or threatening. He tends to regard people as important sources of satisfaction rather than sources of frustration and suspicion.

In building the proper climate in communicating with staff, the Chief Administrator is able to listen, to empathize, to understand, to handle personal feelings, to express self and to be accepting. He should be the:

1. Acceptor of Other's Feelings

The administrator understands and accepts the feelings, thoughts, and values of staff. The administrator shows an interest in the personal and family life of staff members. The staff feels comfortable discussing personal or professional problems with the administrator. The administrator demonstrates empathy for others.

2. Sharer of Own Feelings

The administrator shares personal feelings, thoughts, and values with staff members. Staff members feel they know and understand their administrator as an individual person, not just a role authority.

3. Encourager Through Reinforcement

The administrator utilizes positive reinforcement by praising, encouraging, and complimenting staff members when they deserve such. Humor is used to create a positive atmosphere - and not at the expense of a staff person or in a threatening manner.

4. Encourager Through Feedback

The administrator discusses the thoughts shared by staff members; restates or rephrases the member's comments. Staff members feel that what they shared was important because the administrator gave some attention to the thought or comment.

5. Involver

The administrator involves staff members in discussions relating to the school division. The involvement promotes a feeling of belonging, worth, and interest in the organization. The administrator utilizes questioning skills of content, analysis, decision making, and feelings to promote staff involvement.

6. Provider of Information

The administrator provides staff members with information about aspects of the school division. Staff members believe they are kept informed, as much as is realistic.

7. Provider of Directions

The administrator expresses directions and expectations clearly to the staff. Main points are emphasized. Staff members understand what is expected.

8. Provider of Decisions

The administrator expresses decisions clearly to the staff. The staff understands the decision and how the decision relates to them as team members.

9. Promoter of Personal Growth

The administrator stimulates and encourages the individual staff member toward professional maturity. This involves setting and meeting personal goals. A realistic and honest assessment of staff members' present and future abilities is made by the administrator and shared with the team members.

10. Promoter of Program Growth

The administrator stimulates and encourages program evaluation and improvement. This involves an understanding of the program as it currently exists and those changes that would be beneficial.

In building the proper climate for communicating with professional staff, the Chief Administrator should be aware of the fact that it is not necessarily true that if rules are clearly stated, interpersonal confusion is minimized. In the world of the pyramid structure, quite often clearly defined relations may create problems, especially for the subordinates who tend to experience a world full of clearly defined rules and regulations as a world tending toward rigidity and increasingly requiring submissiveness, particularly if the boss is perceived as an autocrat.

The success of the administrator in setting the proper climate for communication, to a very large extent, depends upon the perceived existing prestige of the administrator and the extent of his requisite expertise.

Beyond these factors it is important that the Chief Administrator understands himself as a communicator. Am I better at communicating in a one-to-one relationship, or in a group setting? Am I better at communicating verbally or in writing?

The administrator should analyze his strengths and weaknesses as a communicator. He should clearly have in mind the characteristics of the audience he will face and the objectives he wants to achieve. Being clear on these factors, he chooses his strongest medium of communication, thereby maximizing the possibility of understanding and positive acceptance of the message he wishes to send.

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